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# EDWARD MAC DOWELL

As I Knew Him

By T. P. CURRIER

## I

LATE in the spring of 1905 I received a letter from Mrs. Mac Dowell containing these words: "Edward has broken down completely, and we are crushed. . . . O! If we had never left Boston!"

This letter was written from Hill Crest, the farm at Peterboro, N. H., where Mac Dowell had been taken immediately after his first pronounced collapse in New York.

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Out of the entire company gathered to meet the young American composer at his first formal appearance in Boston in the autumn of 1888, it would be safe to say that not one could have dreamed that the man who returned their greetings with boyish cordiality, sincerity and gratification, would have come to so untimely an end.

Mac Dowell, as he appeared to them, was a picture of robust manliness. His finely shaped head, carried a little to one side, was well set on slightly drooping shoulders. His very dark hair was close-cut, for he had no liking for the "artistic pose." There was about him no trace of the "professional artist," save perhaps in the stray lock prematurely streaked with grey that would persistently fall on his broad forehead, and in the Kaiser-like curl of his light sandy moustache, which at that time was balanced by a fairly large goatee. His skin was light and clear, showing a slight color in his rather delicately rounded cheeks. Light blue eyes, with light bordering of eye-brows and lashes, a well-cut aquiline nose, and an agreeable mouth and firm chin, completed what any one would immediately call a handsome face.

It was equally expressive. Even casual acquaintance could read in it a kindly disposition, strong sense of humor, energy and determination. In conversation he regarded one frankly and intently; and his face mirrored with extreme quickness his instinctive



To T. P. C.  
from E. M. W.  
Boston April 24. 1895.

response. Anything pleasant or humorous would bring a lively twinkle into the eyes, rapid winking of eye-lids, and a contagious smile, or deep hearty laugh, as the case might be. Profuse compliments would be received with a mingled look of boyish bashfulness and sly suspicion.

Like any artist, Mac Dowell was made happy by appreciation. But somehow, keenly as he inwardly enjoyed the good opinions of others, he could seldom quite subdue doubts of the sincerity behind the compliments. In a letter to me he writes, "You know that I always take things, (praise) with a liberal allowance of salt." It was this sudden uprising of his super-sensitive nature that often held his warmest admirers in check, even while his generally winning personality, like a lode-stone, drew them to him.

Opinions and statements expressed to him, especially those pertaining to music and its profession, would immediately command serious attention: and, it might be added, more frequently than otherwise, engender opposition on his part. For Mac Dowell found it difficult to agree with most of his contemporaries on these subjects. It was then that the twinkle became a glint, and the humorous expression one of aggressive determination. You could not regard him at such times without feeling that here was a man, not only of keen comprehension and power, but one not to be trifled with on matters dear to his heart.

These evidences of strong character were intensified by his bodily appearance. He looked strong. And his strength was practically evinced by his surprisingly vital hand-grasp; no surprise, however, to those who knew his inherent strength of limb. His arms, the special reservoir of power to the pianist, were as solid as those of a trained athlete. His hands were finely but strongly made; and in tramping he knew no fatigue. Mac Dowell, had he not had innate aversion to exercise for the mere sake of physical well-being, might easily have had a body to match his uncommonly strong and active brain.

In fact, strength and determination were his dominating characteristics. They were, however, seldom markedly apparent in ordinary intercourse. His easy good-nature, and especially his extraordinary sense of humor, were far more frequently observable. This last quality was continually betraying itself in eye and lip. It might be said by those who knew him well, that all sorts and conditions of men, their appearance and utterances, seemed to afford him unending food for humorous reflection.

Such was the man so cordially greeted by the large gathering, representative of the professional life and culture of musical Boston

which Mr. B. J. Lang had called together at his house that night in the autumn of 1888. Happily married, hopeful, filled with the desire to do everything possible for his art in his native country, with twenty-nine years behind him, he himself was looking forward eagerly to a life of productive work.

During the last months of his residence in Wiesbaden, he had begun to grow weary of the restraint of life in Germany. He longed for the greater freedom and the stimulus of his native land. Although he had been a stranger to it for many years, he was a true American, and intensely patriotic; and he felt that his place was here. Pressure had already been exerted to induce him to settle in New York. But an interview with Mr. Lang in the summer of 1888 fixed his determination to choose Boston. He knew that this musician, who in those days might well have been termed the friend of all rising composers, had already made Boston's musical circles familiar with many of his compositions. He wanted to be where American musical life was sufficiently active, yet where he could find a quiet home, make a living, and have many undisturbed hours for further composition. For these reasons Boston appealed to him. And the early autumn of 1888 found him settled in a cosy suite in the old-world-like surroundings of the West End.

## II

Those who are acquainted with Lawrence Gilman's delightful book, are largely familiar with Mac Dowell's European experiences. His had been a full and arduous life. From the age of fifteen to the year he married and settled in Wiesbaden, to compose in earnest, he had worked ceaselessly and suffered much. Good fortune, it is true, had come to him in invaluable ways. The terrible grind of the Paris Conservatoire gave him at least a technique which needed only the finishing touches of Carl Heymann to make it complete, and in a sense unique. Joachim Raff was a father to him, grounding him thoroughly in composition and handing him wise, straight-from-the-shoulder criticism. Then there was Louis Ehlert who gave him generous help; and last of all Liszt, who became acquainted and impressed with Mac Dowell through the first Concerto, which the latter played before him. He expressed the wish to do everything possible for the young American, and undoubtedly would have eased his early struggles much more than he was destined to do. For at this time, one of the crises of Mac Dowell's life, Liszt died. It was a distinct shock and grief to Mac Dowell, for it practically meant the loss of his last influential friend in Germany.

He once spoke to me feelingly about his singular ill-luck in losing his four best friends at a time when he needed them most. Heymann became seriously ill in the early 80's. Raff died in 1882, Ehlert in 1884, and Liszt in 1886.

When Mac Dowell arrived at Wiesbaden in 1878, he showed fully the effects of his strenuous, nerve-racking labors in Paris. He was moody and depressed and knew scarcely which way to turn. And but for the kindly Ehlert, and later on Heymann and Raff, he might never have been known to fame. Heymann, himself, already suffering from ill-health, immediately took a strong fancy to him, and it was not long before he came to treat the young foreigner more like a brother than a pupil. Mac Dowell told me how happy he was at being permitted to go to Heymann's home and hear him practice. Heymann, he said, was a wonderful pianist. His trill and passage playing were marvelous. To sit beside him and hear him create tonal effects exquisite in delicacy and color, was a revelation to the student who had become wholly dissatisfied with the facile, empty pianism of Paris. To Heymann, Mac Dowell was doubly indebted. For during those fruitful months he not only learned how to create those effects which afterwards vivified his renderings of his own piano music; but this power undoubtedly influenced him decidedly in the construction of much of the singularly original passage work of his own compositions. Thus, with Heymann and Raff for teachers and friends, and Ehlert ever ready with good advice, Mac Dowell came to a clear understanding of what he wanted to do.

His extraordinarily fortunate and happy marriage in 1884 to Miss Marian Nevins, and the quiet, restful home-life at Wiesbaden, devoted wholly to composition, rounded out these eventful years in Germany. So that, mentally and physically at last in normal condition, he was quite ready to face the stress of existence in his native land.

### III

The early months in Boston, however, in spite of the cordial reception, were not untinged with disappointment. Mac Dowell's fixed idea, as he said to me, was to teach for a living, and compose for his own pleasure. He desired particularly to teach composition; and he was eager to teach it in ways of his own, largely arrived at through the influence of Raff, ways, however, more or less contrary to methods then prevailing. His first shock was the discovery that students possessing creative talent were mostly conspicuous by their absence; and that to live, he must teach pianoforte

playing to any and all who had the price of lessons. Worst of all, to make himself "favorably known," he must play in public! To have to make himself "favorably known," was in fact, not over pleasing to one already with a European reputation. And to face the public as a pianist was at this time to him simply obnoxious.

During his last years in Germany he had become so absorbed in writing that his playing had suffered accordingly. He had renounced all idea of pursuing concert work, and, in spite of evidence to the contrary, he really adhered to his decision. For though circumstance compelled him the rest of his life into periodical appearances before the public, he always spoke of himself to intimates simply as a player of his own compositions. "I hate to practice," he said, "and if people think I don't play well,—well, I don't profess to;—I'm merely a composer-pianist."

The necessity for practicing and playing, however, was quickly forced upon him. Musical Boston was anxious to estimate for itself the ability of the young composer, whose music they liked. And the only way they could do so was through his public playing of the accepted repertory in general and his own compositions in particular.

The Kneisel Quartette offered an engagement. The Symphony audiences were ready to hear him interpret his concertos. The Harvard Musical Association asked him as an honored guest to their annual dinner, which meant that he would be expected to play. And the doors of private houses were open to him for their private musicales.

His first public appearance was at a Kneisel Quartette concert. He played the piano part of a quartette, and movements from his first Suite. His performance met with polite friendliness. It was not notably good, though certainly to Boston's ears notably strange. And it was therefore scarcely calculated to arouse enthusiasm.

Mac Dowell had no love for the string quartette, which, he said to me, was to him like so much "cold veal." It may easily be guessed also that ensemble playing was no more to his taste.

At the Harvard Musical Association dinner, the venerable John S. Dwight's cordial introduction of the distinguished young musician ended with the question, "would he speak or play?" The bashful streak was in full possession of Mac Dowell as he, replying inaudibly "I'll play," slid quickly toward the piano. Once there, however, his spirit of aggressive determination asserted itself. Falling on the keys with a power he would have used to fill old Music Hall, he launched into a performance which confounded the

conservatives of the Association, and delighted the rest. Winding up with his "Czardas," which he rushed through with terrifying speed, he hastened to his seat amid amazed applause. Later in the evening he played with Mr. Lang a "Tone-Poem" for two pianos by his dear friend Templeton Strong. By this time, the company, however pleased or displeased with his playing, was vibrantly aroused and interested. Like the "Czardas," this piece contained much rapid passage work, which fell largely to Mac Dowell. The performance, owing to the pace he set, together with the efforts of the elder pianist to keep up, was something the like of which the Association had perhaps never experienced.

Mac Dowell's playing that evening is dwelt upon because it largely influenced opinion regarding its merits in general. Soon it became apparent that the musical set then dominating Boston did not like his "method." The consensus was that his "scales" were extravagantly fast and blurred, his chord playing too loud, his effects too often vague and violent in contrast, and his use of the rubato and the soft pedal extreme.

It should be said, that at this time, at least, these opinions were not wholly astray. Mac Dowell was badly out of practice, and his hasty efforts at preparation were apparent. Moreover he was still wrathful over the necessity for playing at all, and still doggedly determined not to practice.

Gradually, nevertheless, compulsion had its due effect. By degrees he worked back into a state of technical efficiency, to the end that his performances of his Second Concerto with Thomas in New York, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Boston, in the spring of 1889, stamped his playing as distinctly virtuosic, even if it was not universally liked.

#### IV

Mac Dowell's playing was not only virtuosic; it possessed marked original qualities. It had, in a sense, little in common with that of the virtuosi of those days. His scale and passage playing were decidedly hazy. As he told me, he hated scales and arpeggi for their own sake; and the sole use he had for them was for the purpose of creating effects,—waves and swirls and rushes of sound that should merely fill their place in the tone-picture he desired to portray. His octaves and chord playing, too, were extremely powerful and often harsh in FF, and in PP hardly more clear than his passage playing. In accordance with his own viewpoint, he was always seeking for atmospheric and overtone effects, and to do so he made constant use of the "half-pedal" instead of



the full pedal, which latter would have cut things out too clearly to suit him. Add to this his equally constant use of the "soft" pedal, his sudden and extreme contrasts, and his thundering fortissimi, (fff), and it is not difficult to realize why as a pianist in general he failed at first to satisfy the cultivated listener of that period.

It was not until Mac Dowell appeared in recitals containing a large proportion of his own works, that he won hearty recognition even from those who had been coldly critical, and enraptured those to whom his playing had been from the first more comprehensible.

He had been in Boston three years before he brought himself to the point of returning to the concert platform. In the autumn of 1891, he announced a series of three recitals, to take place in the old Chickering Hall on Tremont Street. I well recall the first drafts of the programmes. They contained that "old chestnut," as he called it, the "Moonlight" Sonata, and a miscellaneous collection of stock pieces, but included only small groups of his own music.

I may be pardoned for referring to my part in their rearrangement. On looking them over, "My dear man," I said, "why do you make programmes like these? What the public wants is to hear you play your own music. You ought to cut out about half of these things and put in much more of your own."

"Get out!" he replied, (a favorite expression of his whenever one opposed his own notions). A few days later, however, he acknowledged that he had "changed the programmes somewhat."

At one of these recitals I sat with Templeton Strong. Strong had been Mac Dowell's dearest friend in Wiesbaden, where the two had worked and tramped together; and Mac Dowell had no sooner got well settled in Boston before he began to urge Strong to return also. But the latter did not share Mac Dowell's enthusiasm for his own country, and was far more devoted to life in the old world. He finally, however, consented to try living in his native land again, and had come that autumn to Boston.

On this programme was what afterwards became the slow movement of the "Sonata Tragica." This was the first part of that work which Mac Dowell wrote. I am not sure that he had even sketched the remaining movements. After listening to it Strong said, "Well, that is about the finest thing Mac Dowell has done yet."

The recitals were successful. His would-be admirers were for the first time able to estimate Mac Dowell's playing at its true worth. They appreciated his exquisite and vivid presentations

of his own music and were made to realize that a poet-pianist lived among them, whose gifts were not paled even by those of Paderewski himself.

At these recitals, also, Mac Dowell's pianistic limitations were made plain. His treatment of the Moonlight Sonata, for example, was erratic, and out of all proportion. For here he tried to create tonal effects to his own liking, with material that would not stand it. In spite of certain beautiful results attained by his radical interpretation, as a whole it lacked unity and Beethovenish feeling.

As an interpreter of the works of other composers, in general, Mac Dowell did not make a marked impression. The fact is that constant improvising and experimenting in the course of writing had quite habituated him to the pianistic style peculiarly suited to his own music. He was entirely out of the ruts of regular practice. To pin himself down to the demands of the standard repertory had grown beyond his patience. For similar reasons it was difficult for him in making programmes to find pieces that would harmonize with his own, and at the same time afford him opportunities for effective playing. He was fond of little things like the Bach Courante, (arranged by himself), and the prelude in C sharp minor, Schubert's Minuet in B minor and Impromptu in E flat, and he rendered them delightfully. His playing of Liszt's fourteenth Rhapsody, Balakireff's "Islamey" and other things of the kind, were virtuosic, but always left him disgusted. He said to me, "I *used* to play them real well!"

I am certain that, had he chosen the career of a concert pianist, he would have proved himself a virile and original interpreter. His pianistic ideals were high and exacting. He had the pianist-composer's love for great playing, and doubtless felt within himself the ability to take a place in the front ranks. But to meet the requirements he would have demanded of himself, meant giving up his life to piano playing, and this idea he scouted. He often expressed the longing to have some big works in hand, like, for example, the Schumann Fantasie. This was a favorite with him and in its rendering his imagination and technique would have found free play. Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata, and the first movement of Opus III also strongly appealed to him, and Liszt's Sonata as well. But the prime thing to him then, was time in which to compose. Practicing meant tremendous sacrifice; for not only had the pieces to be worked up, but certain weaknesses in his technique would have to be overcome.

Mac Dowell had been from the outset trained in a school where velocity first and last was the goal. Speed, indeed, coincided

with his temperament; and when in good practice he could sustain marvellous tempi. But the years devoted to composition had so weakened his control that in his American recitals his fingers at times literally ran away with him, a thing, he told me, he always feared. Technical difficulties in general did not exist for him. Yet certain kinds troubled him. "I don't know what players mean when they talk of difficulties," he would say. "Passages they call hard are easy for me, and others they handle without trouble give me a lot." Again, "I wish I had as clean-cut a finger technique as so and so," naming certain well-known pianists.

These were the conditions that confronted him in his early recitals; for recitals were a very different matter from "getting through" a concerto with orchestra; and they only renewed at that time his determination to "quit the whole business."

No one, however, more quickly recognized and enthusiastically admired the art of the great players than Mac Dowell. The year following his settling in Boston, D'Albert gave his first concerts in this country. D'Albert was an old acquaintance, and had played with Mac Dowell the second piano part of the latter's first concerto before Liszt. He was then in his prime, both technically and emotionally, and his playing deeply stirred Mac Dowell. De Pachmann, too, excited his interest. That inexplicable pianist was in those days a wizard indeed. His overwhelming execution of Chopin's Double Third Study worked Mac Dowell's curiosity up to fever heat. After hearing it played several times, he made up his mind that the "trick" lay in the fingering. And one day he refigured the entire study, hoping thus to discover the secret of De Pachmann's unheard-of velocity. This fingering I cannot fully recall, but Mac Dowell excluded the fifth finger wherever possible and slid the second finger from D flat to C, going down,—thus anticipating Moszkowski's similar fingering.

But above all the others, to Mac Dowell, was Paderewski. When Mac Dowell first heard him in Boston, the two had never met, and the young American's modesty restrained him from seeking the great player's acquaintance. But Paderewski, learning that Mac Dowell was living in Boston, immediately sought occasion to meet the bashful young composer. It was during Paderewski's second visit to Boston that, in conversation with the late J. Montgomery Sears, he expressed his opinion that Mac Dowell was "wasting his time in teaching, when he was just the man to write an opera." Mr. Sears intimating his desire to further this idea, Paderewski gave a small dinner for the purpose of bringing Mac Dowell and Mr. Sears together. At that dinner were

Mr. and Mrs. Nikisch, Mr. and Mrs. William F. Apthorp, Mr. and Mrs. Sears, Mac Dowell and myself. Later in the evening Mr. Sears had a long conversation with Mac Dowell, in which he urged the young composer to give up teaching and accept pecuniary aid from him for any length of time that might be required to "write an opera."

Mac Dowell was deeply touched by this sincere offer. His native independence, however, led him definitely to refuse it. He said to me, "I couldn't accept such a proposition. It would be too much like writing on order. And even if I tried, suppose the opera turned out no good!" And then his genuine modesty was revealed as he added, "but I'm mighty glad any one should think well enough of me to make it."

Mac Dowell's admiration of Paderewski and his playing was unbounded. His manipulation and effects were in complete accord with Mac Dowell's own ideals regarding pianistic art. Once, when sitting with me at a recital by the great Pole, he exclaimed with suppressed emotion, "That's what I call piano playing!" It was, I think, after that recital that he ran all the way across the Common to his house, fearing to meet some one who might stop him "to talk," and thus break into his impressions.

If his feelings aroused by Paderewski's playing are contrasted with those he experienced after hearing later on another pianist, celebrated for his unsurpassed technique, what Mac Dowell liked and disliked in piano-playing may be readily inferred. "It's wonderful," he said, "but you get so sick of hearing those perfect runs in double-thirds trickling up and down the key-board!" Mere technical display, however masterly, left him cold. And I quote these remarks because they indicate clearly what was in his mind when he sat at the piano himself.

Perhaps the advent of these celebrated pianists helped to stir within Mac Dowell his old liking for public playing. In any case, all his early student life had been bent towards this end, and he had known success. Most of all, he felt the composer's natural longing to have his own works heard; and he knew that if that were to be, he must exploit them himself. He had already played for the first time his "Sonata Tragica," at a Kneisel concert. For this initial performance I can fairly claim to have been the promoter. Talking one day to Mr. Comee, manager of the Quartette, I intimated that, if Mr. Kneisel desired, he could induce MacDowell to play it at one of his concerts. This suggestion was promptly acted upon; MacDowell saying to me after he was engaged: "You must have piled it on thick to Comee!"

Both the Sonata and Mac Dowell's playing compelled deep admiration and respect. The critics wrote enthusiastically of the Sonata as an important addition to piano literature, and no less warmly of Mac Dowell's dramatic presentation of it.

Thus encouraged, he announced in the following year a recital to take place in the old Steinert Hall, where the Hotel Touraine now stands. The programme contained the Sonata Tragica, and others of his own works. Mac Dowell had this time practiced hard, and hoped to make the recital an emphatic success. Unfortunately, however, the hard work brought catastrophe in its wake. Shortly before the recital he broke the nail of one finger, with the result that on the day announced he was suffering constant pain. He made a brave beginning and actually got through about half of the Sonata. Suddenly he stopped short. Rising, he held up his finger, explained its condition, invited the audience to "get their money back," and left the platform. The affair was a severe disappointment and discouragement to him, and he characterized it as one more instance when his "Demon of ill-luck got in his work."

But these feelings were not long allowed to remain uppermost. There were by now many demands for recitals from him. Clubs in various sections of the West sent importuning letters; and finally a manager induced him to embark upon concertizing in earnest.

He had two immediate reasons for entering the concert field. He had now completed three important piano works, which he naturally desired to have known; and any addition to his income was decidedly welcome, though material prosperity had in fact already come to him. At the beginning of his third season in Boston he was astonished at being literally besieged by would-be piano pupils. And that year for the first time in his life, he tasted the pleasure of pecuniary ease.

These sudden demands for his services in teaching and playing were a natural result of reports that had spread abroad concerning his activities in Boston. Pupils who could boast of having lessons from him extolled his pedagogic powers and were in raptures over his magnetic personality. Several new compositions written since coming to Boston, "Les Orientales," "Twelve Studies," containing the fascinating "Shadow Dance," and the "Twelve Virtuoso Studies," among which were the "Novelette," "Improvisation," and "March Wind," increased the general desire to hear in recital the genius who had become recognized not only as a poet-composer, but a poet-pianist.

The consequence of this great and sudden interest was that Mac Dowell now became more deeply interested than ever in playing. He studied to increase his own technical resources, making notable progress, as his subsequent performances proved. He planned also a large work on technique, of which he wrote two books only. For the more deeply he got into such experiments the more discouraged he became over the possibility of communicating his own views to others. Many were the discussions I had with him over technical ways and means. His final state of mind on this matter may be summed up in his reply to my question as to when he was going to finish his third book on technique, wherein he had planned to discuss pedalling, etc., and the more subtle ways of handling the piano: "Never," he said.

## V

For about ten years Mac Dowell concertized, largely through the Middle West. He limited his tours generally to the three weeks of each winter following Christmas. The recitals were all arranged beforehand, and the remuneration was guaranteed. He was firm in his decision to waste no time in taking the chances of ordinary concert tours.

To pull himself together, so to say, for these tours, was something he always dreaded. The preparation for them required a large amount of mental and physical effort, which, as subsequently appeared, was altogether too much for him, and an effort he ought never to have made. Through every autumn, up to Christmas time, he worked exceedingly hard during many lesson hours. And although he took only a certain number of pupils, each afternoon found him really too tired for further effort. Yet the remaining hours had to be utilized, and so the spur was applied. Composition, above all, he would have loved to work at. But he was already convinced that in winter this had become out of the question. And since recitals meant added income, they seemed the best way of filling out his time, for the thought of any increased burden of lessons with their attending monotonous grind was absolutely intolerable.

Yielding to the demands of his audiences, his programmes now consisted mainly of his own works. At first thought it would seem a comparatively easy matter for one of his musical grasp and technical resource to play at least his own compositions without an enormous amount of preparation. I once gave expression to this thought.

He replied, "It may seem so to you. But if you had written a passage in half a dozen different ways, you'd find it difficult to remember which one you'd finally decided to let stand."

Evidently there was an obstacle to overcome which could not possibly confront a mere pianist. Nevertheless I do not believe that Mac Dowell was ever at a loss when playing his own works in public. But I suspect he not infrequently improvised to some extent. Mrs. Mac Dowell said to me not long ago that she never understood how he could remember his music so well, and get through his programmes so successfully. This fact is indeed remarkable in view of his comparatively few hours of practicing, and his almost uniformly fine and unique performances.

Another thing that troubled him greatly was getting into the "swing" of playing in public. Even if he had carefully prepared himself, sitting down before people and playing to them, had to be reckoned with. Walking from the lesson-room to the platform, so to say, is an experience no pianist covets. Mac Dowell naturally desired to put his works in the best possible light. And many were his disappointments, accompanied by acute anguish over real or fancied failures. Speaking of them, he said at the end of one of his brief tours, "If I could only start in now and do it right over again, I could play quite decently!"

These tours, although fatiguing, and often undertaken when beset with hard colds and even severer illness, brought him nevertheless change of scene, and compensation, artistic as well as pecuniary. The people, he wrote me, were all that was kind, and their hospitality was shown on every side.

These audiences of the West had one great advantage over Mac Dowell's eastern friends and admirers: they heard him play far more frequently and at his very best. His sensitive nature, together with his shrinkingly modest opinions of his own works, were not calculated to make him determined literally to force them upon people already surfeited with music. The sympathetic attitude and enthusiasm of his western hearers warmed his heart, and he played as he rarely played elsewhere. Those who heard him under those conditions may treasure the belief that they are to be envied by many of his nearest friends.

Mac Dowell's playing of his own music was a revelation of its possibilities, and, to players who had studied it, unexpected and startling. It was as original as the pieces themselves. As Lawrence Gilman has said, Mac Dowell's music, in form and structure, with all its exquisite delicacy and suggestiveness, is

clarity itself. Yet other pianists who had tried their best to give it with commensurate delicacy, suggestion and clarity, found themselves after hearing him far at sea.

Mac Dowell prided himself on his adherence to form. "Nobody," he remarked to me, "can say my pieces and my sonatas haven't form." His playing, nevertheless, far from emphasizing form, was distinctly impressionistic. When listening to him, thoughts of form one entirely forgot; the lingering impression was of a Monet-like tone-painting. It was mystifying. Melodies others loved and learned to play on conventional lines, with definite, singing tone, and correctly subordinated accompaniment, sounded under his hands vague, far off, floating in space. Pieces clearly written, and "splendid for practice," became streams of murmuring or rushing tone. Delicate chord-groups, like his melodies, floated in air; while those in *fortissimi* resembled nothing so much as full orchestral bursts. Who that heard him can forget their first astonishment at his marvellously fascinating renderings of the "Hexentanz," over, almost before it had begun; of the "Shadow Dance," a vaporous mass of vanishing sound; of the ethereal "Water Lily"; of the surging rolling "To the Sea"; his impetuous, virtuosic playing of the "March wind"; and his great tone-massing in the Sonatas? And who can forget their subsequent conviction that these were the inevitable, the only true renderings?

At the piano Mac Dowell was a poet-musician. He was no mere note-player, and was not and never could have been a pianist in the conventional sense of the term. He was the same teller of exquisite poems, the same impressionistic tone-painter, that he was at his desk. He made his pieces suggest their title or story so vividly that notes and manner of sounding them were entirely lost sight of. For the moment he was an improviser. He had a command over technique, pedals, and especially the *rubato*, (which he used with infinite skill,) rarely attained. And back of all was his musical and poetic nature,—the real main-spring of his playing. Few pianists, it is safe to say, have, in this last respect, been so richly endowed.

## VI

Throughout his eight years of professional activities in Boston, Mac Dowell lived an ideal home-life. Home was the veritable backbone of his existence. It was more precious to him than professional success; even composition was a secondary



consideration. Giving up his cozy cottage at Wiesbaden, where the first years after his marriage were so happily spent, he desired above all to continue the same kind of life as far as possible; and so he had drifted naturally to the quiet of Beacon Hill. After the first experimental year, he and his wife removed to West Cedar Street, where they remained until opportunity offered to secure the more attractive house at No. 38 Chestnut Street.

Gradually the figure of "Mac Dowell the composer," became a familiar one on the Common's walks and the near-by streets. It is interesting to recall the change in his personal appearance that came about after several months residence in Boston. For some time he had clung, innocently enough, as it afterward proved, to the high, full-crowned felt hat, the rather fiercely curled moustache, and the goatee, all of which a photograph in Mr. Gilman's book reveals. Then suddenly he appeared in a derby hat, which became him extremely well; and shortly afterward the goatee vanished. Commenting one day on these changes as gratifying, to my eye at least, he replied in genuinely injured tones, "Why didn't you say so, long ago?" Somebody evidently had "tipped him off,"—a thing I for one seldom ventured to do at that stage of our acquaintance.

This metamorphosis having been achieved, Mac Dowell's one desire thereafter was to look like an unobtrusively well-dressed young American, and he succeeded admirably. He was now in his prime. He had gained in weight, and with his well-set-up figure, and easy, leisurely gait, whether walking the streets or strolling on the Common with his collie "Charlie," he was sure to attract attention.

From '92 to '95 were undoubtedly the happiest years of Mac Dowell's life in Boston. The first three, and more, had been checkered with doubts, disappointments, and strenuous experiences, not only exasperating, but creating uncertainty as to the wisdom of having settled in Boston at all. But he had at last won a distinct place in its musical life. He had drawn about him a circle of sympathetic followers, whose numbers were constantly increasing, and he had secured plenty of remunerative work. Best of all, in his own mind, he had maintained what was to him one of the most cherished possessions: his independence. He had asked and received no help from influential sources. He had absolutely made his own way, against considerable odds. His wife, too, had regained health after a severe illness that had necessitated her absence from home for an entire winter. And the extraordinarily congenial couple had found comfort and content in the

Chestnut Street house where their remaining years in Boston were passed. So it was at this time that Mac Dowell enjoyed his work and home, with mind freer from disappointments and anxiety than ever in his professional life.

He was always an inveterate home-body. Generally speaking it was about impossible to get him out for any particular amusement, or for exercise. He liked the theatre, but would rarely go. Fond as he was of base-ball, he was only occasionally seen at a game. Long walks did not appeal to him, except in the country; and no persuasion could have led him into a gymnasium. At one time he reluctantly consented to let me send a gymnastic trainer to his house. The man gave him one lesson,—the first and last.

I speak of this aversion to forms of exercise which would have kept him more fit for his strenuous work, because I believe that lack of it contributed largely to his early break-down. Once in a while he would make half-hearted attempts to "do something." At one of these moments he put a billiard table in his house, which gave him and his wife much pleasure.

What suited him better than anything was a quiet stroll late in the afternoon after the grind of teaching, then home, to read for the evening, unless he was entertaining company, or felt inclined to practice or write. In these hours of leisure, I saw much of him throughout his years in Boston. At my studio he liked to joke and talk about almost anything except musical matters. These he avoided, although in natural course, we "talked shop" a good deal. Of his personal affairs and professional interests he spoke freely, often energetically relieving his mind on matters disagreeable to him. He seemed to like to come; and in various notes occur such words as "hope to find you in to-morrow at four," or, "glanced up at your windows, but they had such a moved-out-last-month-look that I didn't try your door." Occasionally he would play, though he was usually too tired from the "grind," to touch the piano. Often he amused himself and me by going over the keyboard with his gloves on,—a feat he accomplished with great dexterity.

On the streets he found entertainment in watching the passers-by. He had a lightning-like way of taking in their peculiarities, while carrying an expression of perfect indifference. He dearly loved a joke, and at times to get one on the other fellow!

Mac Dowell was not a "club man," although he had most of the necessary qualifications. He really liked club-life, and enjoyed meeting "good fellows." Shyness, more than anything else, kept him from being a frequent attendant. More often than

otherwise it was difficult to draw him into conversation; yet at times he would jump in unexpectedly. I remember well an instance. We were sitting in one of the club-rooms, listening to the talk of several members, who had tried to get Mac Dowell started. They were unsuccessful until the talk drifted to tobacco and its original users. Suddenly Mac Dowell said quietly, "I believe tobacco was first used in such a country, (I forget the one he named,) wasn't it?" A dead silence followed, and then uncertain replies, showing that no one was prepared to controvert him. Afterwards as we walked home I remarked that I didn't know tobacco was first used in ———! "I didn't either," he replied, "that was just a bluff!"

At dinner and afterwards Mac Dowell was almost invariably an exceedingly good companion. He always had something interesting to say; and he rarely failed to reveal in some way his naturally sweet nature. His sympathies were quickly aroused for those who were sick or unlucky or, according to his notions, imposed upon; and his admiration for those who were kindly disposed was especially pronounced. His absolute honesty, strong sense of justice, and humaneness of feeling, easily came uppermost. Sensitive and wrathful he often was over real or fancied injuries to himself, but he readily forgot these to him unhappy moments. There was in him no trace of vindictiveness. He had pretty set notions regarding people he knew, although these frequently changed in the case of individuals as he came to know them better. Discussing the future life one night, he broke out with, "I don't believe *everybody* has a soul. Now ——— *he* hasn't any, he can't have!" Opinions like these I found were influenced by the kindness or unkindness of heart which he believed the individual in question possessed.

That trait of his already touched upon,—his inability to discuss musical matters with other musicians holding divergent opinions, always seemed to me an unfortunate one. Even with his strong prejudices and fixed ideas, his views on other matters he could and would modify; but in these he could and would yield to no man. No matter how amicably he might begin, he was pretty sure to end impatiently, or to change the subject abruptly. I think he regretted this trait in himself, and for this reason strove to avoid such discussions altogether.

Nevertheless Mac Dowell was singularly modest regarding the merits of his own music, and with his intimates would often joke about it. Mr. Gilman has recorded him as apologizing to some friends for leaving them because he had to go and write some

"rotten melodies." To me he would talk in similar vein. Once when I had spoken of my fondness for some of his charming "Idyllen," Op. 28, he answered by telling me how the pieces happened to be written. In Wiesbaden, Strong and he had made a bet that each could write a new piece daily for a week. Every evening they trotted out their efforts of the day. At first they broke even; but finally, Strong's muse deserted him and Mac Dowell finished, an easy winner with the "Idyllen."

Again, he said, "I've got a good joke on the critics. They have discovered "reminiscences" in my—(mentioning one of his poems for orchestra,) but not one has found those bars in it that are straight out of "Tristan and Isolde!" And at another time, "That passage sounds just like Brahms, confound it!"

In a note to me after his Second Suite and his Second Concerto were given at Cambridge, Mass., he writes jovially of the performance:

Killed the Indian again at Cambridge last night. I raised particular merry H. there, and your absence was the only blot.—That section of Cambridge was a lively spot for a while. The orchestra did pretty well, and I think Emil was a bit 'shook up',—The racket was awful. I don't think I ever played better. Will be in your pleasant den to-morrow, Monday, or Tuesday, or some other day.—N.B. New hat! Have given up bicycle, am now expecting the chariot of fire!

Mac Dowell, by the way, was deeply grateful to Emil Paur for consulting him and for making every effort to render this suite according to his own ideas and wishes, and to the orchestra for its splendid, hearty cooperation. He showed it by dedicating it to him and to the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

It is well known that Mac Dowell early displayed decided talent for drawing and painting. And it was at one time a toss up whether he would stick to music or enter the art studios of Paris. This other natural bent brought him in later life many hours of pleasure, besides being undoubtedly helpful in his own sphere of art. He loved beautiful pictures, and his keen eye surely singled them out. Often he would say of some fine painting, "I'd like to own that!" Since, like many another he could not buy what he really wanted, he turned naturally to photographic reproductions. He made exceedingly clever "snap-shots" himself, some of which enlarged into remarkably good views. Finally he took the notion to invest in a large plate camera; whereupon he wanted to experiment on me. For two entire Sunday mornings, to our mutual amusement, he worked with all the airs of a professional, using

up numberless plates. The proofs in general were an agreeable surprise to him. One plate, in which I appeared with head well down, looking at the floor, he particularly liked, all but the pose. The happy thought struck him to cut off the corners, thus bringing the face to look straight ahead. Two or three days later I received a note enclosing this "chef d'oeuvre" (!): "Here is a new picture of you, and a *good* one, I think. No more theatre box, 'flies on the floor' effect. Now be a good boy and either save this for me, or have another printed thus."

It is a matter of rejoicing with me that there are extant a number of beautiful photographs of Mac Dowell. He was not desirous of "being taken," but yielded to the wishes of others, and to business necessities. The horrible "commercial-looking" head of his, taken to "adorn" his early circulars, amused him intensely. "The photographer," he explained, grinning, "said it had to be *hard*, to reproduce well!"

The first artistic photographs of Mac Dowell were taken in Boston by Mr. Benjamin Kimball, one of the finest amateur photographers of the day. Although others subsequently taken in New York are remarkably characteristic, I think none more perfectly reveals the poet-musician than that by Mr. Kimball, reproduced here. When inscribing it Mac Dowell said "he guessed we didn't want any "distinguished regards" or "loving remembrances," to which I replied, "*Not on your life!*"

## VII

After the Mac Dowells had satisfactorily settled upon their city residence, there was still the question of where to spend the summers. It was a problem that had to be solved again and again, with the advent of each spring. To Mac Dowell the summers were of vital importance; for it was then only that he could give himself uninterruptedly to composition.

The first summer after settling in Boston they spent once more in Europe. The opportunity came through the offer of an engagement to Mac Dowell to play his Second Concerto in Paris at a concert to be devoted to the performance of compositions by American composers. What chiefly made this engagement attractive, as he told me, was that it furnished him the money to meet the expenses of a summer in Switzerland.

It was about this time, I think, that the second Concerto was finally ready for publication. Mac Dowell revised it considerably before he let it go. One day he said to me that he

had finished it, and that he thought he "had made it *hard* enough now!" There spoke the ambitious young composer who evidently hoped that the passage work of his Op. 23 would prove a sufficiently difficult nut to crack for some time to come! He himself always played the concerto with magnificent verve, power and abandon. In it his brilliant technique fairly glittered; while certain of his tonal effects were truly remarkable, and at that period novel as well. The power he revealed was astonishing. I said to him after a certain performance that he had filled Music Hall easily enough. "Well," he answered, "I hit the piano pretty hard!"

The summer of 1890 found the Mac Dowells for the first time in Peterboro; and thereafter, except for three years they returned every summer to this New Hampshire village which from the first had attracted them strongly. In 1896, they bought the farm. Its acquisition was a great event. They had hoped to get at the most ten or fifteen acres with the little house they wanted. Their amazement and joy can be imagined when the farmer-owner proposed that they should take nearly seventy acres at about the price they had expected to pay for the smaller tract!

Mac Dowell was proud of his ownership. He often spoke of his pleasure at being able to "tramp all day on his own land." Every one interested in him knows now what the place meant to him for the rest of his life.

York, Maine, was tried experimentally in 1891, but not successfully. A letter from there says:

Please excuse my not answering. I really have been very busy doing nothing,—a confoundedly fatiguing job, as you know . . . . Our summer has not been quite the success as last year's. . . . I think we will go back rather early, owing to the fogs and general moist unpleasantness of the seaside in September.

A letter from Peterboro in Sept., 1892 tells of a saddening and exceedingly anxious summer, notwithstanding which some important work was done. It also indicates his attitude toward certain critics and their views on "American Music,"—which, later in life he made public more freely, frequently to his own disadvantage, and still more so to his own peace of mind.

My poor wife has had a very bad time of it. The heat brought on heart failure and she came as near the edge as I ever want to see any body. For two weeks it was touch and go at any moment. . . . There is a capital doctor here, but my sister-in-law really saved her

life. . . . By the way X— tried to ‘newspaper’ me again, and I wrote him a regular skyrocket,—told him I thought his paper was the most inimical thing to American art in America. . . . He wrote me a very quiet note and said he agreed with me and would back down in his next number. . . . There is only one trouble with X—’s paper. It is rapidly acquiring a poor reputation. I think he does his level best, and his back down, if he does it, proves his courage and desire to improve. A paper, however, which jumps to conclusions so easily, and has to back down in the next number, is a paper which no one cares a hang for. A paper ought to be the Devil or the Lord God. Now, Z— is a very minor devil, and sports a singed tail; still, as a genuine Diabolus his words are at least listened to, and dancing on red hot frying pans is his vocation. . . . N.B. My Sonata (Tragica) is being printed (Breitkopf and Haertel) and will appear in November. I am just finishing Suite No. 2 for Orchestra. (Indian Suite).

The completion of the *Tragica* was doubtless a relief to Mac Dowell. He had spent much time over it, for he naturally was anxious to make his first work in sonata form a good one. I recall an evening when he played more or less of it to me from the manuscript. He still had doubts about the introduction, playing it several times, and discussing it. This page he changed somewhat before letting it go. Some time after the sonata was published I remarked to him that it didn’t seem so difficult to me as at first. He replied in disappointed tones, “It doesn’t to me, either!”

Of the Indian Suite I heard little before it was completed, save that in connection with it, he mentioned several times Dvořák and his “New World” Symphony. Whether the latter’s talk in interviews anent the practicability of “American themes” in composition, influenced Mac Dowell to try his own hand with them, I am not sure.

Through the following summer of 1893 at Peterboro, Mac Dowell evidently kept himself nailed to his desk. In one of his letters then written he could not forego a fling at the coming musical season which, as he viewed it, was looming up for Boston. As has been already said, however, he was afterwards grateful to the new symphony conductor for evincing interest in his compositions, and several times so expressed himself to me:

Hard work and no end of writing have prevented my answering yours sooner. I simply hate the sight of a pen, having just finished twelve new “*Virtuosen-Etüden*” for piano, eight songs, and some other stuff. Breitkopf and Haertel are to publish them. . . . The newspaper puffs over P. . . . are very laughable to me—as for instance, his and his wife’s “solistic” laurels never existed. It is said that he has no command of his orchestra, as he is very nervous and uncertain.

. . . . But who knows—perhaps he will be just the man to suit Boston. I can see those cock-tail criticisms from here. . . . I wish you were in the neighborhood. The drives are beautiful. There is very little to tell you. As I said, I have been working for dear life and will have a pull of it to get through before commencing the lesson grind. I wish I dared take a complete rest, but I know if I don't seize the summer opportunity I must shut up for a year. . . . Remember the twenty-second and to try to make our lunch a possibility. . . .

The set of *Virtuosen Etüden*, Op. 46, was his second attempt to write practically for piano study. Following Chopin and Heller, he aimed to write a set of pieces designed not only to advance the student's technique, but his style as well. With the reception of his first like venture in this field, Op. 39, written for moderately advanced students, he was disappointed, not to say disgusted.

I suspect that general opinion of this work, which included the ever popular "Shadow Dance," was voiced by a piano teacher, who said to me, "They are very pretty pieces, but there's no 'étude' about them." Upon my expressing to Mac Dowell my pleasure in them, and belief in their practicability, he dilated with unexpected warmth; taking great pains to call my attention to every technical detail he had in mind. I recall this as the only instance but one of his saying anything in explanation or defense of his own music.

The *Virtuosen-Etüden* are similarly constructed, though more obviously for technical development. Commenting on them as he handed me an autograph copy he said, "You won't like them, and probably no one will." "Why not?" I asked. "O! they are too strange, too dissonant." It must be remembered that this was ten years before Debussy.

Mac Dowell planned to make these studies different from similar works by other composers, and he attained considerable success. In effect they are *pieces*, and each in its own way is charming or brilliant and well worth learning. The "Novelette" and the "Improvisation" instantly became popular. Mac Dowell himself played the "Perpetual Motion," "March Wind" and the "Polonaise," with irresistible bravura. Some-day, he said to me, he might rewrite and enlarge the Polonaise, thus making it a more important concert piece. But the day never came.

At that time also appeared the first book of Technical Exercises. These, too, proved radically different from other existing exercises. Mac Dowell did not believe in much practicing with both hands together for finger development, and therefore wrote the exercises



for each hand separately. Joseffy was immediately interested in this book. But evidently thinking that "life is short," he wrote for his own benefit an exercise in counterpoint to each one of Mac Dowell's, thus enabling himself to practice them with *both* hands together! It was with an air of great pride that he showed this fruit of his own inventiveness to Mac Dowell.

The group of "Eight Songs" for voice and piano, appeared as op. 47. The preceding, "Six Love Songs," op. 40, published in 1890, was the first set that Mac Dowell wrote in this country. I recall his showing me a somewhat large collection of verses sent him by their author, and that he had considerable difficulty in finding any that appealed to him. At last he chose six and rather reluctantly undertook to write the music. Thus came into being the popular "Thy Beaming Eyes," one of those peculiarly fortunate instances where with a few strokes of the pen the public is captured and held indefinitely.

Finding words for song-writing made Mac Dowell a good deal of trouble, until he concluded, as he told me with much irritation, that he "could write better ones himself." As subsequently appeared he certainly succeeded in writing some that were quite as good, and doubtless more stimulating to his musical thought.

## VIII

Mac Dowell had hardly got well-settled in this country before he began to take a deep interest in American sports. Base Ball entranced him, though as I have said, he seldom attended the games. He would boil with suppressed enthusiasm, and the blood would fairly suffuse his face as he took in with keen zest critical moments of the game. "It's great," he said, "to watch the cock-sure playing of these professionals." The only thing that kept him from playing himself, was the "danger of smashing his hands." His ventures, therefore, were confined to throwing a "soft" ball with some boys at Peterboro. Bicycling also seized his fancy. Lover of outdoors as he was, the bicycle seemed to him an open sesame to the country. For some time he rode as often as possible, and whenever he could get some one to go along. He learned (as he assured me), to clutch the handle bar so lightly as to stiffen neither his hands nor wrists. Unfortunately his interest in this sport gradually waned. It was "too much trouble," or "no fun going alone."

The following letter seems worth printing since it reveals his boyish love of outdoor life. It is written from Cumberland,

Maine, in August 1894, when the Mac Dowells had once more tried the sea-shore.

How are you getting along and how is the good Frau? I haven't seen any account of the 'Flosshilda's' being wrecked anywhere—so conclude luck has not deserted you. I helped a fellow launch his boat the other day (a Hampden), and after the almightiest kind of a tussle we found ourselves on board, adrift with an oar and a boat hook, no shoes nor stockings—while the very devil of a wind was coming up. The boat had as yet no masts, and the tender, (*my* boat) had broken loose and was thumping the rocks. This was about six o'clock,—and all we could do was to struggle to get to the mooring in mid stream. The other fellow had played guard on a foot ball team last autumn, and to his athletics I attribute our managing to hit it so that we got up to the float. The way we hung on to that darned buoy licks anything I ever went through,—thought our arms would come out. Once moored we "sot and sot," yelling to the landscape generally to come and take us off. I had been deep sea fishing all day too, and had no lunch at all but a sandwich and the rather cloying smell of the clam bait (it was real "antika"). I came near getting the 'Risorssardonicans' that Bret Harte tells about.

I have learned to ride a bicycle and to swim this summer—am even rapidly getting over my fear of thunderstorms. This I attribute to the very few we have had!

The summer of 1895 was once more spent in Switzerland. This was the last summer the Mac Dowells passed away from their beloved Peterboro, before becoming permanent residents of that town. A letter written me soon after their arrival at Paris, portions of which I quote, indicates Mac Dowell's state of mind on returning to the capital where he had spent several lonely and painful years during his boyhood. The life in general of that great city gave him no pleasure; and the so-called "attractions" of Paris were oftener than not revolting to his innate purity of thought.

June, 1895—We are still alive and kicking most damnably. The French famine for money is something awful,—regular swindling at every turn,—and the worm turns often—generally to uncover a spot twice as vulnerable as the one already tapped. . . . Went to the Salon—never saw so many nude pictures in my life. Went to the Opera (Widor's *Korrigane Ballet*,) and it was about the same, only the nudities *moved*, . . . . God knows I am not a Puritan of Puritans, but about the worst you can imagine would have seemed decent to it. . . . Paris is the same as ever. The Devil does his Virgilpractice Clavier work in places like Boston etc. *Here* he leads full orchestra with specially loud brass. The up and down clicks wouldn't be heard here. . . . Poor G—is laid up in London with typhoid ever since he landed. Goes back as soon as he mends enough. Poor Devil! We go to Frankfort for a few days on Sunday and then to Switzerland. I will yodel to you through the mail when I get there."

In the following note came the yodel:

E. A. MacDOWELL,  
38 Chestnut St.,  
Boston, Mass.

15<sup>th</sup> July 1895  
Hôtel du Lac  
Vevey, Switzerland

My dear Carrier

Do you think I am going to waste my  
bullion on stamps for letters to you  
without even an echo - ? !!! - - -  
(fill the dashes out yourself -) - or  
haven't you yet gotten over patriotism  
(seemed to me "pat - riots") day?  
How'd you book and do you often  
jump for the life preserver?  
You probably often cry Sundman's  
"bird of one feather" - You remember  
"Well I'll reserve that anecdote as  
you may be ill and it might  
shake you up too much. I have no  
news to tell you until I receive  
a screed from you. We are well  
and both of you are likewise  
affectionate regards -



E. A. MacDowell  
you see I've  
forgotten my  
lines & spaces

Another brief note came later on:

"Laas-Fee, Sept, 1895.—I have been working hard all summer, and only the last two weeks have been free. Lovely weather until now, and we have enjoyed it immensely. My wife has improved in health steadily and it is a good start for next winter. We were delighted to hear the good news. . . . Now get a start on your bicycle and we will have some fine rides."

That summer he finished the "Sonata Eroica." Meeting him in the autumn I said "What have you been doing?" "Sir," he replied, "I've written another Sonata." Then he added seriously, "It's curious, too, but I never noticed for some time that it was in the same key as the "Tragica!"

This certainly was curious, for Mac Dowell was extremely sensitive to the "color" of different keys,—one appearing to him as "red" another "green," etc. His sensitiveness to the pitch of a piano was equally remarkable. He once spoke of having played the "Moonlight Sonata" on a piano which was off the customary pitch, saying that he "heard the whole thing in another key and it nearly knocked him out."

The wear and tear of this high strung organization of his was in fact constantly going on. He could not hear music of any kind without listening with extreme intensity. One evening I inveigled him into going with me to a social gathering given in their rooms by a club of artists. Some one, among others, played a violin solo,—not very well at that. A lady remarked to me afterwards, "Did you see Mac Dowell? The poor fellow couldn't keep his head still through all that dreadful playing!"

It was largely due to this pull upon his nerves that he kept away from concerts as much as possible. At the Symphony Concerts, his had become a familiar figure in the second balcony of the old Music Hall. Curious people soon began to notice that frequently during the performances of "classics" he would disappear,—to return when some modern number was to be played.

"What's the matter with Mac Dowell?" they said, "he can't seem to stand a Beethoven Symphony." And, "Why doesn't Mac Dowell go to concerts like the other fellows," (referring to his brother composers). The truth was that Mac Dowell, knowing the classics from A to Z did not care to waste his strength on them. New and other modern works were more interesting, and their scoring more important to him. To take in more than one such work of large dimensions was all he could possibly endure without exhaustion. Therefore he was actually compelled to save himself whenever possible.

The appearance of the "Erioca" excited in my mind wonderment at Mac Dowell's continuing to write in this form for the piano. In orchestral writing he had apparently come to a standstill. I asked him the reason and received this reply: "It's one thing to write works for orchestra, and another to get them performed. There isn't much satisfaction in having a thing played once in two or three years. If I write large works for the piano I can play them myself as often as I like."

Much is revealed in this reply. Mac Dowell had reached the point where he wanted to express himself more often in the larger forms. It may have been that with the completion of the "Erioca" he had in mind a general scheme which found fruition in the "Norse" and "Keltic" Sonatas. Writing for the orchestra had begun to look unpromising, in spite of its being his chief ambition; and he felt the futility of giving up the many hours to writing works that he would hear so seldom. He lamented the fact also, that a composer could never hear a score tried out here by a friendly conductor, as was possible in Europe. And besides all this he could not get sundry experiences with conductors out of his mind. The production in Boston of his first Suite was a sore memory. Mr. N— intimated his desire to play this suite, then in manuscript, and Mac Dowell, anxious to have it done "exactly right" took great pains to indicate all dynamic effects, and especially, with metronome, the fluctuating tempi. His feelings may be imagined when, as he told me, N— paid not the slightest attention to these marks, but played the work "to suit himself!" "Conductors are devils!" he wrathfully exclaimed.

It should not be inferred from this that Mac Dowell was inordinately conceited concerning his own music. The very opposite is true. He composed as he said, "for his own pleasure." But, though this might be construed that he didn't care whether any body liked his music or not, he really had an inward longing both to have it liked and understood. He was genuinely grateful for what he felt to be real appreciation. Also, Mac Dowell had a genuine desire to help others as he would be helped. He would give his time to any one whom he believed needed it. Had he himself been a conductor, I am sure that he would have done everything in his power to give the young composer opportunities to hear his own works; and his time in criticism as well.

His sense of honesty and justice, however, was the unfortunate cause of his being frequently misunderstood. No matter how strong his desire to be friendly and helpful, he could not refrain from saying what he honestly thought. A young composer, for

instance, brought to him for criticism a piece he had been trying to score for orchestra. The scoring was so hopelessly bad that Mac Dowell knew hardly what to say. But gently going over it he criticised as lightly as possible this point and that, flinging in encouragement on the way. At the end he was suddenly aghast at the thought that he really had about "cut up the whole thing." The young man at last, with a faint smile, moved toward the door. "And then," said Mac Dowell, "as I opened the door for him, I *couldn't* let him go without telling him that the 'cello part was written all wrong!"

There are undoubtedly many of Mac Dowell's pupils who have not forgotten his inspiring enthusiasm, and his cordial interest and words of sympathy and encouragement. He was impatient with the foolishly helpless, but would do his utmost for those who were willing to work hard. Himself a tremendous worker, he could not brook laziness or half-heartedness in others. The amount of energy that he put into his piano lessons would have exhausted most teachers, as it frequently did exhaust himself. But he threw himself into this work with good-will and the desire to give his pupils their "money's worth." He labored long and patiently, even with dull, inefficient pupils, who sometimes got into his classes; although these occasionally aroused his ire. Once he told me of a young man who was so aggravatingly flabby in body and hands when sitting at the piano, that Mac Dowell couldn't stand it. "I gave him," he said, "a slap on the back that nearly knocked him off the seat, and told him to sit up and play like a man!" Shortly afterward, this student stopped his lessons!

Of his best pupils he was proud. He liked quick results, and to be able to say that this or that pupil had learned such a piece in a very few hours. Sometimes, when trying to whip his pupils into velocity, he perhaps forgot the years he had spent in acquiring it himself. Speaking of a certain finger exercise, he said, "Try it. I practiced it about an hour a day for months, and *thought* it did me good!"

Of the numberless hints and suggestions continually thrown out by him, one was proved signally fruitful. Wishing to incite several of his more ambitious pupils to still greater efforts, he urged them to get together frequently and play to one another. They eagerly seized upon the idea, and promptly formed a "practice club." From this informal beginning evolved the Mac Dowell Club of Boston, now large and thoroughly organized, helpful to students, and in many ways beneficial to musical interests of the city.

The winter of '95 and '96 found Mac Dowell at the pinnacle of his success in Boston. He had about him a very large circle of devoted and enthusiastic friends, admirers and followers, to whom his words and suggestions were law. With an ample income, far beyond, no doubt, what he once had even dreamed of commanding, with applications for lessons that he had constantly to refuse, he was in an enviable position.

But this had really been true for the past three years. And the novelty had begun to wear off. In fact, the strain involved to maintain this position was beginning to make itself felt. Mac Dowell had struck a great pace, and anxiety as to his power of maintaining it was creeping in. Thoughts of the fluctuations in business that are liable to come even to the most successful private teacher, unquestionably gave him uneasy moments.

He was by no means a money-getter for the sake of mere possession. He valued money only for what it would secure in comfort and independence. Like most young men, he was eager to make a competence on which he and his wife might depend later in life; and this desire more than any other led him to take all the work he could possibly stand. The moments of fear he experienced were enhanced also by his doubts concerning his own physical strength. Not infrequently he felt "used up," he as expressed it to me; and for some time during this, his last year in Boston, I had noticed that he was displaying less of his customary buoyancy and jollity of spirit. It had become harder to get hold of him and to get him out. "Work" was his more constant excuse. His quiet, secluded home environment was the only thing that was keeping him going.

So the winter drifted into spring. And with it came the first proposals that he should take the position of Professor of Music at Columbia University, New York City, and organize a department of music. Mac Dowell considered this proposal for weeks before he decided to accept it. It would take him to New York, where he had so far steadfastly refused to go. It meant eight months of constant, hard work in a field to which he must accustom himself. There would be little time which he could call his own. And for the first year at least, he would be obliged largely to make up his courses as he went along. Nevertheless the position was one of rank and honor. The opportunity presented itself to demonstrate views concerning the teaching of music which had long been forming in his mind and were now more or less crystalized. And he had been promised absolute

independence as to his methods of procedure. The fixed income, too, appealed strongly to him. There would be no worry for a number of years over financial problems; and there would be chances to add to his receipts through private work. Altogether it appeared the opportunity of his life; and so he embraced it.

Having decided, Mac Dowell's spirits, already elated at having just acquired the farm at Peterboro, rose to the occasion. The summer was spent largely in reading up and otherwise preparing for his prospective work. He found time, however, to superintend improvements on his house, and to write the "Woodland Sketches,"—those tone-poems so exquisite in inspiration and finish, which included two that will doubtless remain among the most appealing and popular of his for a long time to come: "To a Wild Rose" and "To a Water Lily."

In the middle of September I received a letter from him which indicated his state of mind over the coming removal, and the anticipated effect his first year in New York would have upon him.

Hill Crest, Peterboro, Sept. '96. . . . I was just on the point of writing to you when your letter came. . . . We will be very sorry not to see you in Boston. We will be there only one night, however, and perhaps putting off seeing you now may mean seeing you sooner in New York. . . . We are so sick of trunks and packing that anything of that nature seems a calamity. . . . I will take you up on your offer to keep me posted as to matters musical in Boston.

I expect to be ten years older by springtime, and any little alleviations you can give me from time to time as to what "dam fools" other people are, will be welcome.

## IX

The season opened auspiciously, and Mac Dowell began his works with hopes high. His election to the conductorship of the Mendelssohn Glee Club was a great pleasure to him. He felt that here was a chance to show what he could do in conducting; and the men promised enthusiastic response to the original work he had in mind.

A letter written after two months in New York tells the story of complete absorption in his new labors.

If you only knew how wildly busy I am you would forgive my not writing—probably you do, any way. I wish you would write oftener. Boston seems far, far away, but the friends in it somehow grow dearer. . . . I am delighted with my work in many ways, though composition is as far off as ever, and I haven't touched the piano for many months. If I live until spring I will give up complaining about my health and look down with a pitying smile on malt-fed Sandows and the rest.



The lecturing is intensely interesting and I think it has been fairly successful. I have received many offers of engagements, the last being to deliver a course in New Orleans. I will do three weeks piano playing in January and February. The Mendelssohn Club is good fun and the men act well and work for me like demons. The first concert will doubtless be ragged but I hope the chorus will do wonders before the season is over. . . . Glad everything goes well with you. . . . Oh! the hustle and bustle of this city!. . . . I have to "address" a meeting to-night (students). You wouldn't know me. I'm getting a Dan'l Webster look in spite of the bristles having grown again.

No wonder that he and Mrs. Mac Dowell eagerly rushed away in the December holidays to Peterboro for a few days of much needed rest. The following note came from there in December:

Christmas Day we are to be with Miss — (in Boston). I think the number is 503 or 533. Your giant intellect will probably pierce the mystery without difficulty. Hope to get a glimpse of you. If I get in your neighborhood I will try your bell. . . . Our "estate" here is looking fine.

At last came May, when he hailed with joy the completion of his first year at Columbia.

May 7, '97.—To-night is my last Mendelssohn Glee Club concert and on the fifteenth I give my last lecture. On the sixteenth I expect we will be on our way to Peterboro via Boston. The Parker House will probably shelter us over Monday. . . . We will go to the farm (an "admirer" has promised me one pig for it!) and in the week of June ninth I will have to return here for commencement and examinations, on which occasion gown, hood and exceedingly wise cast of face will be in order. . . . Hope to find you blooming and a year younger. It will be pleasant and homelike to see Boston again to say nothing of you.

It is not my intention to dwell in detail upon Mac Dowell's life in New York. The nature of it is indicated in his letter of November '96, already quoted. My dear friend had again struck a pace compared with which his Boston "gait" was a gentle stroll. Work and more work was the order of the day. At the end of two years he gave up the leadership of the Mendelssohn Glee Club; but foolishly, as I then thought, he allowed himself to be drawn deeply into private teaching. The summers were spent in hard work at composition. The list of his opus numbers reveals his untiring energy and his wonderful recuperative powers. For during these last vacations he wrote the two Sonatas, "Norse" and "Keltic," the "Sea Pieces," the "Fireside Tales" and the "New England Idyls," besides choruses and songs.

These new important piano works naturally were an added incentive for a continuance of winter concert playing, for which the demand was ever increasing. In March, 1899, Mac Dowell ended a tour in the West with a recital in Boston. The programme included the "Eroica" and many other pieces of his own. He was greeted with a crowded house, and never played better.

After the recital he and George Marston, the song writer, (of whom he was extremely fond) and I, dined together. Mac Dowell was in good spirits, though very tired. I was much impressed by the marked change that had come over him. He appeared older, and his mind seemed weighted with responsibility and the load he was carrying. Not that he alluded to such matters; he tried to be as jolly as ever. One remark that he made, however, as we walked across the Public Garden together, has since appeared to me "a key note:" "The only thing is to be as useful as we can." More and more he was feeling it a solemn duty to do all that he possibly could for his beloved art and for those interested in it.

A few days after the recital I received a letter which shows his thoughtfulness for others, and his sensitiveness to criticism. It is the only letter to me in which he ever defended his playing or his compositions.

March 27, '99.—I forgot all about that porter of the hall. Will you not give him the money for which I enclose check. If you should think it too small just add what you like and let me know. I will be 'eternally obliged.' I have unhappily still one more concert in D—, next Tuesday. They wouldn't take no for an answer, so I've got to air my 'hard tone'—much to my regret. I see A— has chimed in with K—. Well, we have been in the 'Merry dance' together before, so I suppose I needn't mind. . . . My compositions have stood the racket, and as for the playing, I am receiving more offers of engagements than I can answer. The New York recital has made a great time I think, and while you know I always take things with a liberal allowance of salt, I will confess to feeling gratified at the appreciation. . . . Pardon this egoism of yours,——,

For over a year thereafter I was in Europe. No letters passed between us during that period. Mac Dowell was driven harder than ever, and I in turn found little time for letter writing.

In December, 1900, after my return, I received New Year's greetings from Mac Dowell:

If this reaches you it will bring our best wishes for the New Year. I trust it will be a happy one and prosperous. We are much the same

here. . . . Poor Marston is having a hard struggle, I suppose you know. . . . Well, we will all have to fight for our lives and fail sometime. Rather gloomy, no doubt, and you must forgive creaking at this jolly time of year. . . . As for you it will probably take months of "put yo' fum under," (Marston's jokes do recur to one!) to take down your foreign exuberance. . . . If you come to New York don't let us miss you. I'm doubtful of being near Boston this winter.

Another evidence of his increasingly serious attitude toward life. One more note from him, the last I find of interest here:

Feb. 8, 1902.—Stress of work has prevented my writing you sooner. I too was sorry to have missed you in Boston. but last summer was a dreadful one, and I was only at the club for convenience's sake. I am glad the Indian music gave you pleasure. G— played it here—but as he didn't send me a ticket or ask me to a rehearsal, I did not go. But from what I heard of it, the Indians must have worn their Tuxedos. My Sabbatical year at Columbia comes next winter, and I shall (D. V.) go abroad and play and bring out some new things."

His mention thus early of his first "Sabbatical Year," indicates that the rest coming to him was already being looked forward to with longing.

It was in Easter week of 1905 that I saw Mac Dowell in New York,—so shortly before his complete collapse. Receiving word of my arrival, he made an engagement for dinner, or rather Mrs. Mac Dowell made it. That dinner was an unforgettable experience. When my wife and I reached the place of appointment we found Mrs. Mac Dowell waiting for us. At her request I remained at the door until Mac Dowell should come. At last he appeared. His looks and response to my eager greeting struck a chill to my heart. Pale, and thin, all his old brightness and energetic bearing gone, he seemed like one just up from a serious sickness. With no show of interest he replied feebly and almost inaudibly, "I'm not very well. Where is Mrs. Mac Dowell?" Already he had begun to cling helplessly to her. At dinner he brightened somewhat. Yet he found little to talk about except the one thing that still, after a year, was constantly going around in his mind: his break with Columbia. All its details he rehearsed with painful elaboration, in the manner of one utterly weary of the struggle. No other subject excited any interest on his part. On the way to our hotel one other thought seemed to fill his mind: the fear of being run over. A few weeks before he had been knocked down by a cab, which nearly passed over him, to which accident was partly attributed his final breakdown. With the utmost care he piloted my wife across the street; and there we parted.

A few days later I attended an informal recital by some of his pupils. His manner then was that of one struggling to hold onto himself. Sitting beside the piano he tried by slowly waving his hand to stimulate each pupil to added expression or brilliancy; but activity and animation were absent. After the recital he endeavored to speak encouragingly to each of the pupils, as one after another bade him goodbye. One young girl of twelve or fourteen stood looking up at him intently for several moments before he spoke. At last he looked down at her and almost whispered, "Little giant!"

When he was free I asked him if we could not do something or go somewhere. Mrs. Mac Dowell replied for him, "He has an engagement. Things are very different here in New York." He repeated mechanically, "Things are very different here in New York. I have an engagement at one."

I therefore departed. And I did not see him again for a year, when he had become like a little child.

A few weeks after I left New York, Mrs. Mac Dowell in great alarm got her husband to Peterboro. And shortly afterwards came the letter from her from which I have quoted the words at the beginning of these recollections.

The high-strung, extraordinarily sensitive organization, sapped by over-work and the terrible anguish caused by the termination of his connection with Columbia, brought on Mac Dowell's end. He was not fitted by nature to cope with situations where change, or interference with plans he had set his heart on, might have seemed advisable. He could not argue. Either he must do what he wanted to do in his own way, or not at all. In this peculiarity he was not set apart from many another. Where he differed from many, however, was in his utter inability to throw off the pain and disappointments which followed his rupture with Columbia. Matters troubling him less vitally he could have risen above. But to his far-reaching, progressive plans (as they appeared to him), for the musical department, he had given his whole heart and strength. When, therefore, the impossibility of carrying them on was borne in upon him, he suffered a cruel hurt. And it came at a time when his over-worked mind and body were in no condition to withstand the shock. Others would have "washed their hands of the whole business," and regained their health and poise through rest and private work, but he simply succumbed. For weeks he could not sleep. And it was at this time that he said to Mrs. Mac Dowell, "This business will kill me." After this first result, his wife, as she told

me, began to notice the change creeping over him, which continued its insidious work, until his death.

On June twenty-third, in his forty-seventh year, after a comparatively painless illness of about two and a half years, Mac Dowell quietly passed away. He was buried the twenty-sixth at the Peterboro farm,—as his devoted wife wrote me, “in a beautiful spot on one of the hills he loved so well.”

## X

In view of all that has been written of Mac Dowell's music and its place in the literature of music, further comment or conclusions here by me are uncalled for. With Mr. Gilman's penetrating and sympathetic analysis I heartily agree. No one of Mac Dowell's friends and contemporaries could, at the date of his writing have done the task more completely. And Mr. Gilman himself says, “There is no need to attempt at this juncture to speculate concerning his place among the company of the greater dead; it is enough to avow the conviction that he possessed genius of a rare order, that he wrought nobly and valuably for the art of the country which he loved.”

I may add that his personality always seemed to me a part of his music, as his music was a part of himself. He was of the same type as his music. The originality and fertility of invention, the love of color, the exquisite taste, the underlying hints of melancholy, deep-felt and never sentimental, the warmth and depth of imagination—these were the expression alike of the musical genius and of the magnetic personality, the high ideals, purity of thought and purpose of the whole-souled, sweet-hearted man.

Mac Dowell's influence and memory are doubtless felt and cherished more and more by others who knew him well, as they are by me. As a composer he will be known principally by his pianoforte works. I believe, too, that admiration and love for these works will steadily increase. His smaller, more immediately appealing pieces are already secure in the affections of numberless music-lovers. It only remains for the highest achievements of his genius,—the Suites, the Sea-Pieces, the Sonatas,—to find through frequent and sympathetic interpretation by the great players their rightful place among the master works of pianoforte literature.